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stage," and with "*Le Dédale*" Mr. Walkley is apparently quite satisfied. It is, indeed, technically without a flaw, a marvel of precision, and immediate dramatic effectiveness. But it achieves so fully what it attempts because it attempts little. Admirable economy of French art with its hatred of waste or irrelevancy! Such is the blight of dramatic criticism as practised to-day. The man is pulling a different way from his critical principles. But Mr. Walkley's nature is by no means subdued to what it works in; he breaks a good many of his own laws and is not always consistent or logical. His "*Drama and Life*" is like some of the plays he enjoys, but condemns. It has in places broken the mould of current dramatic criticism. It is the better reading on that account, and may be commended even to those wise persons to whom the present English stage is a subject of little interest.

F. M. COLBY.

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#### O. HENRY'S SHORT STORIES.\*

FOR the first time since the eclipse of Mr. Kipling the short story is again beginning to make public appearance between book-covers. Publishers still look upon it somewhat askance, as on one under a cloud, and authors, worldly-wise, still cling to the novel as the unquestioned leader. But here and there a writer now boldly brings forth a book of short tales, and the publisher does his part. The stigma of the *genre* is wearing off, and for the rehabilitation one man is chiefly responsible.

Mr. Sidney Porter, the gentleman who, in the language of some of his characters, is "denounced" by the euphonious pen-name of O. Henry, has breathed new life into the short story. Gifted as he is with a flashing wit, abundant humor and quick observation, no subject has terrors for him. If it be too much to say, in the old phrase, that nothing human is alien to him, at least the larger part of humanity is his domain. The very title of one of his books, "*The Four Million*," is a protest against those who believe that New York contains only four hundred people worth while. O. Henry backs the census-taker against the social arbiter. The rich and the fashionable are,

\* "*The Four Million*," by O. Henry: McClure, Phillips & Company, 1907. "*The Trimmed Lamp and other Stories of the Four Million*," by O. Henry: McClure, Phillips & Company, 1907. "*Heart of the West*," by O. Henry: The McClure Company, 1907.

in his tales, conceived much in the spirit of similar characters in melodrama, except that the ingredient of humor is put in to mitigate them. Indeed, they figure but seldom. But the poor and the lowly, the homeless lodger of the city park, the vagabond of the "bread line," the waitress, the shop and factory girl, the ward politician, the city policeman, the whole "ruck and rabble" of life, so meaningless to the comfortable, unobservant bourgeois, are set forth always with keen knowledge, with a laughing humor, and not infrequently with a tender, smiling pathos. As this panorama of the undenoted faces of the great city passes before the reader, he becomes his own Caliph Haroun-al-Raschid, and New York a teeming Bagdad, full of romance and mystery.

The facility, the light touch of O. Henry, his mastery of the vernacular, his insight into the life of the disinherited, make it needless for him to resort to such inventions as Stevenson's learned Arabian, imaginary author of the "New Arabian Nights." The piquant and picturesque phrasing, the dash of slang, the genial and winning fancy seem to carry off the most fantastic situations. The Touchstone, the jester, the merry-maker has always enjoyed a certain license if he had but the wit not to abuse it. O. Henry's fun is never of the slapstick variety and his pathos never bathos.

We are shaken with sad laughter at the many and divers attempts of the park-bench vagabond, Soapy, to be arrested and sent to the workhouse for the winter months. He eats a meal and does not pay, he steals an umbrella, he accosts unescorted women, but all to no purpose. The police seem to regard him "as a king who could do no wrong." But as he passes by a church the organ music of an anthem vividly recalls his boyhood, stirs the tramp to his depths, and he resolves to turn over a new leaf. He will seek work and be a man. Then a policeman lays a hand upon him, hales him before a magistrate as a vagrant and the city's swirling machinery of the law sends Soapy to "the Island" after all. And the author smiles with tender compassion over this poor shuttlecock of fate.

With no less humorous kindness does he deal with 'Tildy, "the unwooded drudge," the plain little waitress in an Eighth Avenue chop-house. All the hurrying *clientèle* of that eating-house admired Aileen, who "was tall, beautiful, lively, gracious and learned in persiflage." But no one had a word for 'Tildy of

the freckles and the hay-colored hair, until one day a tipsy laundry clerk put his arm round 'Tildy's waist and kissed her. For a brief space that transformed her life. 'Tildy the unnoticed began to bind ribbons in her hair, to prink and to preen after the fashion of daughters of Eve. "A gentleman insulted me to-day," she modestly informed all her customers. "He put his arm round my waist and kissed me." And as the diners turned upon her the stream of badinage hitherto directed at Aileen alone, 'Tildy's heart swelled in her bosom, "for she saw at last the towers of Romance rise above the horizon of the gray plain in which she had for so long travelled." 'Tildy had a thrilling sensation of fear lest Seeders the laundry clerk, in a mood of jealous love-madness, rush in and shoot her with a pistol. This she deplored, for no one had shot Aileen for love, and she did not wish to overshadow her friend. When Seeders does come in it is only to apologize, with the plea that he was tipsy. 'Tildy's towers of romance crumble to earth. The glory fades suddenly, for it was not love at all that actuated Seeders. But Aileen the staunch-hearted comforts 'Tildy in her sorrow, for if Seeders "were any kind of a gentleman," she tells her, "he wouldn't of apologized."

"The Trimmed Lamp" is of a piece with "The Four Million," filled with the tragi-comedy of life much as it appeared to Dickens and to François Villon. In "Heart of the West" the author exploits a vein that many have attempted in the short story as well as in the novel—the so-called "wild West." But no one, it is safe to say, has brought so much fun and humor to the Western story. Cattle-king, cowboy, miner, the plains and the chaparral—material of the "dime novel," but all treated with the skill of a Maupassant, and a humor Maupassant never dreamed of. The merest sketch of them has a certain substance to it. Yet it is idle to compare O. Henry with anybody. No talent could be more original or more delightful. The combination of technical excellence with whimsical, sparkling wit, abundant humor and a fertile invention is so rare that the reader is content without comparisons.

HENRY JAMES FORMAN.